

Promising Practice: Healthcare Profession-Specific Cohorts

Gateway Technical College

Healthcare Profession Opportunity Project

The Gateway Healthcare Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP), supported by Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) from the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, has established a number of cohorts training for specific healthcare professions. The first was a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) cohort. In order to establish this cohort with a hospital partner, the HPOG program met with the human resources department of the hospital to discuss its current hiring needs. An HPOG specialist set up recruitment days and was present in the cafeteria on site at the hospital to recruit students. In addition, fliers were displayed to advertise this opportunity. The hospital established the eligibility criteria for prospective students: they could be part time or full time, couldn't be on probation, and needed a supervisor's recommendation. Once eligible students were identified, an orientation session was scheduled. HPOP worked with the hospital facilities department to arrange for classroom and lab activities to be held in appropriate settings.

Thirteen students completed the cohort. All were employed with Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare. Five continued with HPOP in other healthcare training. Some of the students sought other employment opportunities elsewhere.

Having experienced successful CNA cohorts, the Gateway HPOP considered the development of a Health Unit Coordinator (HUC) cohort. Again the employer was asked about specific hiring needs, and the employer expressed a need for HUCs. There was a recruitment process similar to the one done for the CNA cohort. The Gateway HPOP created a blended course schedule incorporating both computer and classroom instruction. Two nights a week students met face to face, and one night they completed work via Blackboard education software. Seven students are currently enrolled and anticipate graduation in May 2013.

The idea for a specific Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) cohort was not created with an employer partner. Rather, it developed during a church event when a pastor suggested that there were some students who could benefit from working as EMTs. At that time EMT training was offered only at a rural location 30 minutes away from the city, making it difficult for prospective students to attend. Gateway HPOP bought out a class so that HPOP could hold its own EMT training, made up entirely of HPOP students. To do this, a meeting was held with the dean of the service occupations and the lead instructor of EMT. During that discussion the meeting time and place for the course, possible instructors, and requirements and obligations of the course were established.

The HPOG grantee spoke with the lead EMT instructor at Gateway Technical College and began outreach. Outreach went viral, and 42 people showed up demonstrating interest in the 15 training slots available. The goal of the EMT cohort is to have a higher passing/completion rate than the 50% rate the college currently has.

The first team meeting held with these students featured a mandatory orientation from the lead instructor that detailed the EMT field. That was followed by specific orientation to the HPOP program itself. All paperwork for the EMT cohort was completed on site at the orientation. All students also participated in a Strengthquest assessment. In addition, a previous student served as a mentor onsite, talking to the new students about what the program was like for him, discussing the time commitment needed, and sharing the story of how he got started in the field. This process gave prospective students a very realistic picture of what the EMT field would be like, and students were encouraged at this early stage to honestly assess their suitability for the field. Each month there was a team meeting where the EMT students meet with the HPOP specialists, met with their mentors, and interacted with guest speakers who came to discuss topics such as study skills, test taking strategies, resume writing, and other soft skills.

For the EMT and HUC cohorts, students still had to come to campus to access some of the equipment. However, the first two classes of the HUC cohort were offered on site at the hospital. For the CNA cohort, everything was brought to the hospital location for the students, including books, uniforms, and orientations to labs. In addition, the students in the EMT cohort were loaned laptops for completion of online exams for three months. Students enrolled in these cohorts were charged NO tuition. The HPOG program paid the salaries of all the instructors involved with the courses.

Camaraderie with fellow students is at an all-time high in the cohort classes. The students form bonds that go beyond the classroom, studying together and supporting one another throughout their time together. In addition, with the cohort model the students always know the schedule for class dates and times.

Promising Practice: Incentives Program
Gateway Technical College
Health Professions Opportunity Program (HPOP)

The Gateway HPOP offers several mutually reinforcing approaches to help participants along “the HPOP journey”: helping students meet program requirements; recognizing and rewarding excellent participation, attendance, and academic success; and enabling students to earn points redeemable toward valuable supportive benefits through the incentive program. Students beginning on the HPOP journey initially receive the student handbook, which describes the program requirements that participants must meet, such as the meetings and workshops they must attend. Through attendance at these meetings and workshops or achievement of specific benchmarks, participants accumulate a specified number of points for each completed activity. These points can then be utilized monthly to purchase incentives. Gateway’s incentive program and policy was reviewed and approved by the awarding agency before implementation of the program. The grantee gained approval by: working closely with the awarding agency; providing a clearly outlined policy with incentives closely tied to programmatic goals and student support; and identifying incentives that were allowable and reasonable.

Students are eligible for this program while they are enrolled in the school program, and eligibility terminates once they obtain employment. A point list of incentives is provided to students so that they are aware of the incentives available (items such as diapers, hygiene products, school supplies, cleaning supplies, gas cards, etc.) and the cost of each of these incentives in points. In order to apply points toward a specific incentive choice, a student fills out an incentive request form and submits that form to his or her HPOP program specialist. The program specialist fills the student order and the student returns later to collect the incentive.

To make the incentive program relevant and meaningful to students, HPOP director Stacia Thompson says, “It is imperative to interview students to determine which items they would most like to earn. Recently, a popular incentive has been energy cards that can be redeemed with local energy providers. Some students have found it difficult to meet rising energy costs, and the energy cards have helped them pay their household energy bills.”

For other grantees considering starting an incentive program, in addition to surveying students to determine which items they prefer as incentives, it is necessary to determine the budget allotment needed to cover the program. For example, Gateway had to factor into its budget the \$50 price of the energy cards and the months of the year in which they would receive greater numbers of requests for the cards. During seasons other than winter, Gateway tends to receive more requests for energy assistance because then local energy companies have more leeway to shut off a customer’s power during this season than they do during the winter months, when consumer protections are in effect.

Once budget considerations have been addressed, it is imperative to set guidelines about the process through which incentives are obtained. For example, Gateway specifies in the student handbook that the student must participate in certain meetings and workshops, complete an

incentive request form, and submit this form to the program specialist. Reward points can only be redeemed for items on the menu list and cannot be redeemed for cash. Also, the handbook specifies that incentive requests must be made during the first week of each month.

As a result of the incentives offered in the Gateway HPOP journey, student participation at workshops has increased dramatically, and students have given positive satisfaction scores on workshops attended. A recent positive outcome noted is that 30 percent of the HPOG participants had attended a workshop series. Many students indicated they enjoyed the workshops they participated in because they not only earned points toward valuable and necessary products but also obtained a wealth of information by attending workshops that they might not have attended if incentives hadn't been offered. In addition, they made social contacts with the other participants during these events, resulting in an informal cohort of HPOG participants.

The courses students are required to participate in include subjects such as diversity, resume writing, dressing for success, interview skills, and nutrition. A sample of the Gateway incentive program follows:

100 percent attendance/week	10 Reward Points
2.0 GPA per academic term	20 Reward Points
3.0 GPA per academic term	30 Reward Points
Complete Strengthquest assessment	10 Reward Points
Attend HPOP workshops	10 Reward Points
Attend face-to-face meetings with HPOP specialist	10 Reward Points
Successful completion of Health Care Occupations Certificate	200 Reward Points
Academic success (recognized by Dean's List)	100 Reward Points